

Chapter 7

Canada: The Case for Information Technology

Karen Hanley works as an applications programmer for E&G Insurance Corporation in Toronto, Ontario. She is known as a computer whiz and is a valued and professional employee. Recently, Karen has been coming to work much earlier than usual and staying much later. David Burnside, her good friend and office mate, noticed Karen's longer hours and was thinking of asking Karen why she wanted to work so hard. But David was also working longer hours because of the special project he was assigned to, and he got so busy that he forgot about Karen and her unusual work schedule.

One night, David stayed late to finish a progress report for his project. When he tried to open his data file to work on the report, his computer had a system error that he could not correct; therefore, he decided to use Karen's computer to finish up the report. In a rush, David turned on her computer and accidentally opened one of Karen's files: he found himself looking at a series of invoices for a company called Hanley Associates. He was confused at first, but gradually everything became clear.

One year ago Karen had started her own computer business and was keeping all her records on the business in E&G's computer. Apparently, she was using E&G's customer database and selling it to other companies that were in competition with E&G. As the truth dawned on David, he felt shocked. Karen, his close friend and respected colleague, was behaving like a computer criminal—and getting away with it!

While David continued browsing through the file, he saw what a highly successful business Karen had. She was actually earning more than her salary at E&G. Now David began to wonder how many of the hours Karen spent at E&G were really devoted to her job. David was concerned. What should he do, if anything? He knew that E&G had strict system guidelines that stated the rules for computer operation and prohibited the personal use of confidential company data. There were severe penalties that would be imposed on abusers. In fact, he knew Karen would be fired if he revealed her actions to his supervisor because they were clearly illegal.

"I wish Karen were here right now," thought David, as he logged off of her computer. "She probably has an explanation for this—money problems or other issues." He stood up and began to pack up his briefcase. He felt tired and had a terrible headache.

As he looked at his cell phone, he briefly considered calling Karen. Maybe he could talk to her and point out the risk she was taking with her professional career. In David's eyes, she was jeopardizing her credibility and excellent reputation, everything that she had accomplished at E&G. On the other hand, maybe he should discuss this with his colleague Ed Perry, an attorney who worked in the legal department of E&G. Without revealing a name, he could describe the situation and see what Ed thought about it. But what if Ed insisted on getting the real facts? Then David would be caught between his loyalty to Karen and his loyalty to E&G. He did not want to face that dilemma.

So on further reflection, David decided to call Karen and suggest that they have coffee together at a cafe near her apartment. In that relaxed setting, he could explain how he had accidentally happened to find out about her business and how dangerous it was for her to steal information from E&G. If she had any sense at all, she would realize that she had to close down Hanley Associates.

Discussion

1. What types of regulations do most companies have concerning the use of confidential company data by employees?
2. Should David tell his supervisor about Karen's computer abuse?
3. Should David talk to Ed Perry about what he discovered, without revealing who the computer abuser was?
4. Should David talk to Karen and warn her of the penalties for computer abuse?
5. Should David forget he opened that file on Hanley Associates and not get involved in Karen's private affairs?
6. What would you do in this situation?

Case Study Report

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